



# The Den . . . In Focus

## First Street Update

Mayor DeWitte has often stated that First Street is a 100-year project. Its redevelopment will set the tone for revitalization of the entire downtown for a long time. More importantly, the downtown represents everyone's neighborhood. Consequently, it will significantly affect the social character and economic vitality of the entire community.

Working together, the City and First Street LLC (the developers) have been making steady progress. All of the property necessary for the project is expected to be assembled by January 2006, with construction to begin in the spring or summer of the same year. The intervening months will be busy with the formal process of plan review, public hearings and developing the detailed construction drawings.

The City's financial consultant will evaluate the financial implications of recent changes to the concept plan. To support their analysis, they rely on independent studies. A market study is completed to evaluate local demographic and economic trends, existing supply of similar units and projects under construction. The rental and purchase price of residential and business units, as well as the pace at which those components will be sold, are all carefully evaluated. In addition, an independent construction management company evaluates the cost projections anticipated for each building. All of this affects when and how much money will be received. The "bottom line" of the financial analysis is whether the developers are receiving a competitive return for their investment. If they are not, the next question is whether the tax increment financing district (TIF district) will create enough economic gain to bridge the gap between what the analysis shows and the "market" return. Prior analysis has indicated that the project is viable.

While discussion about First Street has generally been focused on increased shopping opportunities, residential and commercial uses, a major part of the plan is for public improvements. The river corridor will be greatly enhanced, along with streetscape improvements, a large public plaza and greatly increased parking. There will be many less noticeable public improvements as well. Overhead electric lines will be placed underground, and generally all of the sanitary, storm sewer and water mains will be replaced.

Highlights of the project include:

- \$120 million private and public investment
- 400,000 sq. ft. of retail, office and residential redevelopment
- 78 condos, 34 rental apts., 59,000 sq. ft. of office space, 88,000 sq. ft. of retail space
- 2 parking garages with a total capacity of 780 cars
- First St. widened for diagonal on-street parking
- One-half acre plaza area, extending from the parking garage on the west side of First Street to the river
- Riverfront pedestrian walkway Plaza to Illinois St.
- Relocation and expansion of the Blue Goose within the redevelopment area

Over the next few months, the plans will be refined to reflect the input of the various citizen boards and commissions. The plan review and approval process also provides an opportunity for other citizens to comment on the plans. We encourage the public to attend meetings where the plans will be presented and offer their suggestions. Following is the anticipated schedule where the plans will be reviewed.

### **Purpose Hearing Group - F = Firm/T = Tentative - Date**

Presentation of Concept Plan  
Plan Commission  
F - Sept. 20 (7 p.m., City Hall)

Presentation of Concept Plan  
Downtown Partnership  
F - Sept. 21 (7:30 a.m., City Hall)

Presentation of Concept Plan  
Historic Preservation  
F - Oct. 5 (7 p.m., City Hall)

Presentation of Concept Plan  
Planning & Development Committee  
F - Oct. 10 (7 p.m., City Hall)

Present formal plan and submittal for zoning approval  
Plan Commission  
T - Dec. 6 or 20

Present formal plan and submittal for zoning approval  
Planning & Development Committee  
T - Dec. 12 or Jan. 9

Present formal plan and submittal for zoning approval  
City Council  
T - Feb. 6

At the public hearings, the developer will present plans and “walk” through each component of those plans and how all of those components integrate. He will also discuss the type of housing, office and retail uses. The boards and commissions will ensure that the plans are in keeping with the 2000 Downtown Strategic Plan as well as all of the regulatory codes. In addition, a citizens group created Design Guidelines for Frist Street that will provide another standard to which the developer must adhere.

Public space and public amenities are critical to the success of this plan. The City’s greatest asset is the Fox River, and it is critical that this plan take full advantage of its beauty. There will be extensive discussions regarding public spaces and how well the First Street Plan integrates with the river. The Historic Preservation Commission will offer comments about how well the plan fits with the character of the existing downtown. In addition, careful attention will be given to building materials and the streetscape.

As the hearings progress, the exact dates and times can be found on the City website at [www.stcharlesil.org](http://www.stcharlesil.org). You may also contact the Community Development department at 377-4443.

## Traffic Issues

In the City of St. Charles, we are challenged each day with traffic, similar to many other parts of the County and State. A common response from residents who fill out the Priorities Survey are the concerns about traffic volume and flow through

the city. Residents are concerned with speed and safety in our neighborhoods. We regularly monitor the 44,000 vehicles that travel across the Main Street Bridge through the downtown each day to ensure the timing of lights is appropriate and keep traffic moving. We also keep track of the types of vehicles (cars, trucks, etc.). Police and Engineering staff use this information as a means to know where our services are needed the most.

Traffic safety is a priority to the City. Crashes that occur are reviewed to determine the cause, and whether roadway improvements are needed. This also helps to direct police enforcement efforts at locations where history has shown there is a high probability for crashes to occur. The locations likely to have the greatest number of crashes are on both East and West Main Street.

In the current Business Plan for the City, the Police Department used these concerns as a guide to set objectives related to traffic. Issues related to traffic have been discussed with various residents and businesses at meetings.

The information gathered has been put to good use. The level of enforcement with the Police Department has increased substantially, with over 250 citations issued for speeding in the month of August.

While enforcement is not our preferred choice to manage traffic, it is an important tool. It helps to validate the perception of our residents. At the same time, it begins to retrain the motoring public. The observation of enforcement efforts begins to change the psychology of drivers to know that this is a concern, and if they were not monitoring their speed before, perhaps they should pay closer attention and ideally stay within the limits as posted, knowing the consequence of traffic fines or court.

We have also seen new laws added to encourage drivers to focus on driving. Cell phones have been targeted as a distraction, and distractions are known to be related to traffic crashes, added speed, failing to yield and other violations. It all contributes to keeping traffic moving safely.